Axolotl Lake Land Acquisition

Environmental Assessment

January 15, 1999

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DRAFT

MEPA/NEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of Proposed State Action** Land Acquisition

2. **Agency Authority for the Proposed Action** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Montana Annotated Code 23-1-101

3. **Name of Project** Axolotl Lake Land Acquisition

4. **Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)**

5. **If Applicable:**

   Estimated Construction/Commencement Date __
   Estimated Completion Date __
   Current Status of Project Design (% complete) __

6. **Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)**

   NE1/4SE1/4, Section 8, T7S R2W, Madison County

7. **Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

   (a) Developed:
   residential . . . . . __ acres
   industrial . . . . . __ acres

   (b) Open Space/Woodlands/
   Recreation . . . . . 25 acres

   (c) Wetlands/Riparian
   Areas . . . . . 15 acres

   (d) Floodplain . . . . . __ acres

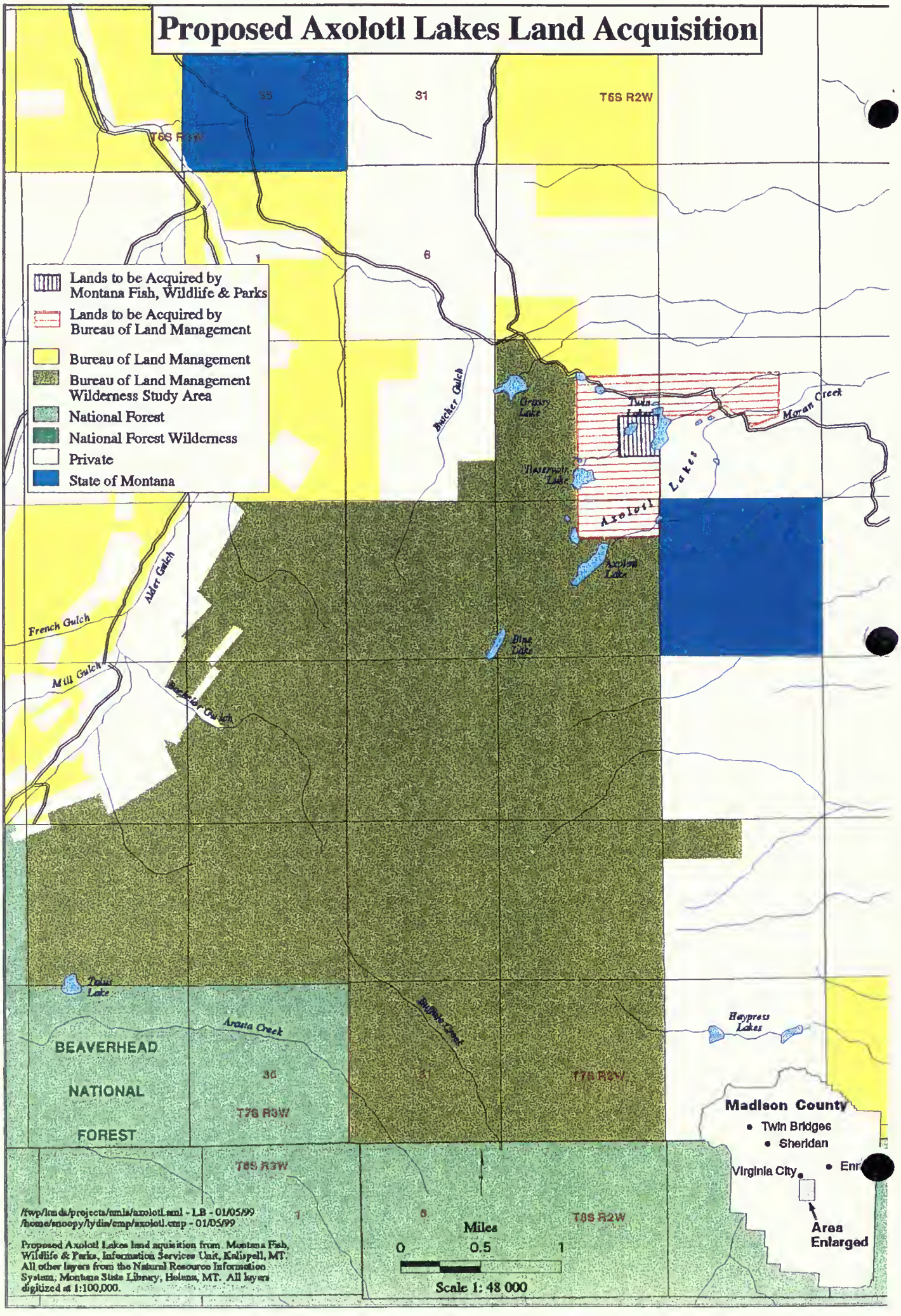
   (e) Productive:
   irrigated cropland . . . . . __ acres
   dry cropland . . . . . __ acres
   forestry . . . . . __ acres
   rangeland . . . . . __ acres
   other . . . . . __ acres

8. **Map/site plan: attach an original 8 ½" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.**

   See attached Map.

/93

Proposed Axolotl Lakes Land Acquisition



9. **Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action.**

Severe declines in Montana's native populations of fluvial Arctic grayling, Thymallus arcticus, have precipitated a state-led recovery program to bolster Montana's dwindling stocks of fluvial, wild, self-sustaining grayling. In conjunction with the recovery program, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase a 40 acre tract of property and access easement which includes one of the Axolotl Lakes that has been used as a brood lake for the fluvial Arctic Grayling Recovery Program. A brood stock derived from native Big Hole River grayling was planted in 1988 in Upper Twin Lake (also known as Cutthroat Lake) of the Axolotl lakes basin. Each year since 1992, the landowner has provided access for FWP personnel to collect fertilized eggs from the brood stock. Fertilized eggs have been transported to state fish hatcheries where the young were reared for reintroductions and recovery efforts. The goals of this acquisition are: to maintain access to the fluvial grayling brood source and continue conservation of Montana's fluvial grayling, protecting an ecologically unique area from development, and maintaining access for the enjoyment of the public.

FWP proposes to acquire 40 acres of land and an access easement in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to acquire 400 acres of adjacent land. The proposed acquisition of 440 acres by FWP and BLM borders the BLM's Axolotl Wilderness Study Area. The fair market value of the 440 acres is $1.6 million as determined by a certified appraiser. FWP's funding will be $150,000, from the Fishing Access Acquisition Account. The proposed acquisition contains all or portions of the five Axolotl Lakes containing Arctic grayling, rainbow and cutthroat trout, as well as a diversity of wetland and upland areas providing habitats for moose, elk, deer, antelope, black bear, beaver, bald and golden eagles, nesting ospreys, Axolotl (tiger salamanders), and many other species. Acquisition of these properties would ensure public access to these diverse habitats and the Axolotl Wilderness Study Area.

The BLM proposed acquisition is part of a larger land exchange to acquire two other parcels sought for public ownership on the Beaverhead and Big Hole Rivers. The BLM's goal is to improve the BLM land ownership pattern while acquiring lands with high resource values for the public's benefit. The BLM land acquisition proposal is contingent upon securing federal Land and Water Conservation Funds and authorization of proposed land exchanges. A separate Environmental Assessment has been drafted by the BLM for these parcels as well as the Axolotl Lakes tract. Information in this Environmental Assessment is specific to the 40 acre FWP Axolotl Lakes Land Acquisition proposal.

Location and Description of the Project Site:

The 40 acre tract is located on privately owned land by Mark Perrault. The tract is located in the northeastern foothills of the Greenhorn Mountains approximately 10 miles southwest of Ennis and 5 miles southeast of Virginia City, Montana (T7S R2W Section 8, NE 1/4 SE 1/4, Madison County)(see attached map). The tract encompasses 25 acres of grasslands and timber as well as 15 acres of upper Twin Lake and surrounding wetlands. The area is representative of an extinct volcanic caldera which is relatively rare in the Greenhorn and Gravelly Mountain ranges. Upper Twin Lake is naturally-formed and fed by surface- and groundwater at an elevation of 6860 feet. Surface area of Upper Twin Lake is approximately 6.4 acres, with a maximum depth of about 15-20 feet. The lake outlet spills over a falls at the east end of the lake and drains underground toward Lower Twin Lake.

Need for the project:

Fluvial or stream-dwelling grayling, which were once widely distributed in the upper Missouri River and tributaries above Great Falls, are now restricted to the Big Hole River - an area representing about 5% of its historic range in Montana. This remnant Big Hole population, whose numbers plummeted during the drought years of the 1980s, has increased and stabilized in recent years but remains at risk of extinction.

In 1987 an inter-agency Arctic Grayling Recovery Workgroup was formed to draft and implement a recovery plan. In 1988, a brood stock was developed using gametes collected from wild Big Hole River grayling. Brood stocks are located at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Bozeman Fish Technology Center (FTC) and at Upper Twin Lake in the Axolotl chain of lakes. Recent problems have greatly restricted use of the FTC brood stock. Facility upgrades are expected to improve brood stock capabilities in the future. Until then, the Upper Twin Lake brood is the sole source of fluvial grayling eggs.

In 1988, Upper Twin Lake was stocked with fluvial Arctic grayling. Additional brood grayling were stocked in 1993 and 1997. This brood stock was established specifically to guard against loss of the single brood reserve stock at the FTC. Recent problems at FTC have confirmed the critical role of this stock.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requires FWP to initiate five new reintroduction efforts of fluvial grayling by the year 2002. If a sufficient brood source is not available and introductions are not completed on schedule, the USFWS could initiate an endangered listing for the species. Acquiring public ownership of the Upper Twin Lakes tract would ensure access to the brood source enhancing on-going recovery efforts.

Scope of the Project:

FWP proposes to maintain the brood stock in upper Twin Lakes and plant additional brood grayling as needed. FWP would continue annual operations capturing and spawning grayling, transporting fertilized eggs to state fish hatcheries, and rearing for reintroduction or research purposes. All grayling planted into upper Twin Lakes have and will be tested for bacterial and viral diseases prior to stocking. No diseased fish or fertilized eggs will be planted or transported to state hatcheries.

Anglers and hikers have been permitted to access the Perrault property by written permission administered by the Madison River Fishing Company in Ennis. In 1996, approximately 225 permission slips were granted; approximately 75% to anglers. The remaining 25% were hikers or siteseers. Total numbers of people accessing the 440 acres of Perrault property were estimated at 700-800 persons. Access to the property is walk-in only from Madison County Road #42.

FWP proposes to continue allowing public access on upper Twin Lake. Research has clearly shown grayling to be highly resistant to hooking mortality. Thus, angling for grayling would be allowed under catch and release regulations. Access would remain walk-in only from Madison County Road #42, which is maintained by Madison County. FWP would use an unmaintained trail to access the lake during spawning and monitoring operations. This trail would be closed to motorized use by the public year round.

A Cooperative Management Agreement for the entire 440 acre tract will be drafted between BLM and FWP after the purchase of these properties. If the purchase of the BLM 400 acre tract is authorized it would be restricted to non-motorized access as is the adjacent BLM Wilderness Study Area. At the very least anglers and recreationists would have walk-in access to three of the Axolotl Lakes within 1 mile of the county road.

10. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

Agency Name	Permit	Date Filed/#

(b) Funding: Fishing Access Acquisition Account

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	$150,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Bureau of Land Management	Cooperator

11. **List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:**

SHPO, Bureau of Land Management

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES **Will the proposed action result in:**	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▸ a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
▸ c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other _____		X				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

2. AIR **Will the proposed action result in:**	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▸ a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		x				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		x				
e.♦For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		x				
f. Other _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

☼ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

▸ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

♦ Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▸ a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		x				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		x				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		x				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		x				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		x				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		x				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		x				
I. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		x				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		x				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		x				
l. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		x				
m. ♦For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		x				
n. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		x				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		x				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?			x			See 4d. Next Page
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				
f. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		x				
g. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4d. Agricultural or Industrial Production: This property has been leased for limiting cattle grazing. If the acquisition proceeds, a new lease would have to be negotiated in conjunction with BLM.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		x				See 5a. Below
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		x				See 5a. Below
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				See 5a. Below
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		x				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		x				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)				x		See 5a. Below
i. ♦For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		x				
j. Other: _____						

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish/Wildlife Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5a. Acquiring and protecting this tract will preserve the diverse aquatic and terrestrial habitats in a nearly pristine state. The fluvial Arctic grayling is a species of "Special Concern" in Montana due to its limited numbers and distribution. The USFWS recently classified listing of the fluvial grayling under the federal Endangered Species Act as "warranted but precluded" by higher priority listing actions. The 1996 MOA between the USFWS and FWP established a time line to meet specific recovery goals. The proposed acquisition of the 40 acre parcel with Upper Twin Lakes will aid in the on-going recovery efforts to meet scheduled recovery goals, thereby reducing the likelihood of listing. Bald eagles are currently classified by the USFWS as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act. No bald eagle nests have been located in the Axolotl Lakes area; however, bald eagles nesting in the Madison Valley frequent the Axolotl Lakes to forage. The proposed acquisition would benefit this species by securing these foraging areas.

A unique neotenic population of tiger salamanders, or axolotls, inhabit the proposed acquisition area. While they are not present in upper Twin Lake, they are known to inhabit Blue and perhaps Axolotl lakes. Larval tiger salamanders may be present in other lakes within the proposed acquisition. The population is unique in that axolotls do not complete the traditional salamander life cycle and metamorphose into terrestrial salamanders. Rather, axolotls become sexually mature and reproduce in the aquatic larval form. An ongoing study has estimated that 5200 salamanders live in the vicinity, primarily in Blue Lake, and attain ages greater than of 11 years. Although tiger salamanders exist throughout southwest Montana, there are no other known population of salamanders where neoteny occurs at such high rates. The acquisition of the 40 acres around upper Twin Lake would preserve wetland habitats that may be important to axolotls, but the greater acquisition would preserve habitats critical to the survival of axolotls in Blue Lake.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		x				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		x				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		x				
e. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		x				See 7a. Below
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		x				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		x				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		x				
e. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. Agricultural or Industrial Production: This property has been leased for limited cattle grazing. If the acquisition proceeds, a new lease would have to be negotiated in conjunction with BLM.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		x				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		x				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. ♦For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		x				
e. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?			x			See 9a. Below
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		x				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		x				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		x				
f. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluation. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9a. Acquisition of the proposed land tract would secure these lands for public ownership eliminating the potential for development.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		x				See 10a. Below
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				See 10b. Below
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		x				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		x				
▸ e. Define projected revenue sources			x			See 10e. Below
▸ f. Define projected maintenance costs.	x					See 10f. Below
g. Other:_____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluation. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. Monitoring and maintaining the Arctic grayling brood and egg collecting operations will continue with no additional work load. Drafting and implementing a Cooperative Management Agreement between the FWP and BLM will require minor redirection of work activities.

10b. The Axolotl property acquisition would not effect the local tax base as the Department will make payments in lieu of taxes which will match the amount of taxes currently collected.

10e. FWP's funding will be $150,000, from the Fishing Access Acquisition Account. These funds will be used to secure the acquisition of the additional 400 acres by the Bureau of Land Management.

10f. A Cooperative Management Agreement will address maintenance.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		x				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
►c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)		x				
d. ♦For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		x				See 11d. Next Page
e. Other: _____						

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluation. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11d. Acquiring the proposed 40 acre tract would secure public ownership and access to Upper Twin Lake and maintain high recreational and aesthetic resource values. The proposed acquisition is adjacent to a Wilderness Study Area.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
►a. Destruction or alteration of eny site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or peleontological importance?		x				
b. Physicel change that would effect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of e site or area?		x				
d. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.e)		x				
e. Other: _____		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluation. Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT°				Can Impact Be Mitigated°	Comment Index
	Unknown°	None	Minor°	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		x				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		x				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		x				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		x				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		x				
f. ♦For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		x				
g. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		x				

* include an attachment with a narrative explanation describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

2. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

1. The "no action" alternative:

Not proceeding with this proposal could limit the supply of grayling that are available for use in the state's grayling recovery program. In the event that existing problems at the Bozeman Fish Technology Center are uncorrected and the grayling brood stock at Upper Twin Lake is not secured, Montana's grayling restoration program could suffer major setbacks. If a sufficient source of grayling is not available for recovery efforts and the recovery goals of the MOA between FWP and the USFWS are not met, the USFWS could initiate an endangered listing for the species. This proposal will help ensure that reliable supplies of grayling are available to continue recovery efforts and meet recovery goals.

Not proceeding with this proposal may allow commercial development interests to purchase the property, limiting public access for anglers and recreationists, as well as diminishing ecological and aesthetic values and degrading fish and wildlife habitats.

2. Lease the property or purchase an administrative easement:

The landowner was approached regarding these options and was not interested.

3. Preferred Alternative:

The preferred alternative and the proposed action is to proceed with the acquisition of land with access and continue the Arctic grayling operation as required to meet the requirements of the Memorandum of agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

FWP used the following criteria to evaluate the proposed acquisition.

1. The tract contains a valuable, productive brood source for the petitioned fluvial Arctic grayling.
2. Upper Twin Lake provides popular fishery and recreational opportunities.
3. This tract along with the proposed BLM acquisition would secure public ownership to 440 acres of an ecologically diverse and unique landscape with high recreational value and biologically rich fish and wildlife habitats.
4. This tract along with the BLM acquisition would provide additional access to the bordering BLM Wilderness study area.

4. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

Given the level of impacts an EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this action.

5. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The EA will be mailed to interested citizens and groups. A 30-day public comment period will end February 13, 1999. A public meeting will be held on Thursday January 21 at the Town Hall in Ennis, Montana, at 7:00 pm. A Press release and legal notice will be issued to local papers announcing the public meeting. Mail comments to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Axolotl Lakes Land Acquisition, 1400 South 19th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59718-5496.

6. Duration of comment period if any: January 15 to February 15, 1999.

7. Name, title, address and phone number of the Person(s) Responsible for Preparing the EA:

Jim Magee, Fisheries Biologist
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
730 ½ N. Montana Street
Dillon, MT 59725
(406) 683-9310

Pat Byorth, Fisheries Biologist
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1400 So. 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718-5496
(406) 994-6938

Darlene Edge, Real Estate Specialist
Field Services Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406)-444-4042

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT